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## ABSTRACT

Educational research has ascertained that parents who are actively involved in their children's learning at home help these children become more successful learners in and out of school. Learning activities requiring more imagination than equipment are presented for four age levels. These reading, writing, math, science, and social studies home learning activities are geared to foster confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense, and problem-solving in children of all ages. For example, very young children (grades K-3) can search for letters of the alphabet on cans of food, improvise story endings, count laundry items, and learn to care for plants (as a science experiment). Older children can act out dramatic poems, make picture stories, and use newspapers for making pretend investments or comparing sport scores. Teens are encouraged to develop problem-solving habits by learning and applying a six-step process and to discuss feelings with parents. (MLH)

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# Parent Power



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## A Major Ingredient in the Recipe for Educational Success



*Letter from Keith Geiger, President  
National Education Association*

## **Parent Power:**

*A Major Ingredient in the  
Recipe for Educational Success*

*The foundation for successful schooling begins at home. It's at home that children form their attitudes about learning. And it's at home where the values that children will carry through life are formed. It's from the "at home" classroom that students learn the basics of getting along with people, communicating effectively, and solving problems.*

*I have yet to meet the parent or caretaker who doesn't want his or her child to succeed in school. In today's fast-paced society, however, parents and others with responsibilities for children are hard-pressed for time and are increasingly looking for guidance on how to best help their children. With this publication, the NEA seeks to provide some of that assistance. The "Home Learning Recipes" are suggested activities that adults can easily carry out in their homes, with their children, to build skills that will last a life time.*

*These recipes were prepared for NEA by Dr. Dorothy Rich, founder and president of the Home and School Institute in Washington, D.C. Since 1964, Dr. Rich has been designing innovative ways for parents and teachers to work together to nurture children's achievement.*

*The recipes here are geared to foster confidence, motivation, effort, responsibility, initiative, perseverance, caring, teamwork, common sense and problem solving - skills Dr. Rich calls "megaskills."*

*The lessons can be taught at home in little time and at no cost. With reinforcement in the classroom, they can pay major educational dividends for your children, your family, and our collective future.*

*Keith Geiger*

# Parent Power:

*A Major Ingredient in the  
Recipe for Educational Success*

## Grades (K-3)



Educational research has made it clear that parents who are actively involved in their children's learning at home help their children become more successful learners in and out of school.

Here are some reading, writing, math and science Home Learning Recipe activities. Parents of young children in prekindergarten through third grade will find them to be easy and enjoyable ways to work with the school—using materials they have at home to build their children's skills.

### Reading Activities

- *Hidden Letters*—Build reading observation skills with this activity. Ask your child to look for letters of the alphabet on boxes and cans of food and household supplies. For example, find five A's or three C's or any number of letters of combinations on cereal boxes, soup cans, bars of soap. Start with easy-to-find letters and build up to harder ones. Then have children write the letters on paper or point out the letters on the objects where they were "hidden."
- *Telephonitis*—Give your child practice in reading numbers left to right by dialing a telephone. Make a list of telephone numbers your child can read—for relatives, friends, the weather bureau—and have your child make a call or two.
- *Sorting and Stacking*—Teach classification skills with dinnerware. Ask your child to match and stack dishes of similar sizes and shapes. Also have your child sort flatware—forks with forks, spoons with spoons.
- *Let 'Em Eat Shapes*—Teach very young children to recognize basic shapes, using toasted bread, jam, and a dull-edged knife. Cut the bread into different shapes—rectangles, triangles, squares, circles. Make at least two of each shape. Ask your youngster to choose a pair of similar shapes, then to put jam on the first piece, and to place the second piece on top to make a sandwich.
- *Dress Me*—Increase your child's vocabulary. Teach the name of each item of clothing your child wears—shirt, blouse, sweater, sock, shoe—when your child is dressing or undressing. Also teach the body parts—head, arm, knee, foot. Then print the words on paper and ask the child to attach these papers to the clothes in the closet or drawers. Make a silhouette of the child from a large sheet of paper, tack it to a bedroom wall, and ask your child to attach the words for the body parts to the right locations.

### Writing Activities

- *Comic Strip Writing*—Use comic strips to help with writing. Cut apart the segments of a comic strip and ask your child to arrange them in order. Then ask the child to fill in the words of the characters (orally or in writing).
- *Disappearing Letters*—Promote creativity and build muscle control with a pail of water and a brush. On a warm day, take your children outside to the driveway or sidewalk and encourage them to write anything they wish. Talk about what they've written.
- *Story Endings*—Improve listening skills and imagination. Read a story aloud to your child and stop before the ending. Ask the child how the story will turn out. Then finish the story and discuss the ending with the child.

### Math Activities

- *Laundry Math*—Sharpen thinking skills by doing a necessary household job. Ask your youngster to sort laundry—before or after washing. How many socks? How many sheets?
- *Napkin Fractions*—Make fractions fun to learn. Fold paper towels or napkins into large and small fractions. Start with halves and move to eighths and sixteenths. Use magic markers to label the fractions.
- *Weigh Me*—Teach estimating skills. Ask your children to make guesses about the weight of several household objects—a wastebasket, a coat, a full glass of water. Then show children how to use a bathroom scale to weigh the objects. Next, have them estimate their own weight, as well as that of other family members, and use the scale to check their guesses.

### Science Activities

- *Ice Is Nice*—Improve observation and questioning skills through freezing and melting ice. Add water to an ice cube tray and set it in the freezer. Ask your child how long it will take to freeze. For variety, use different levels of water in different sections of the tray. Set ice cubes on a table. Ask your child how long they will take to melt. Why do they melt? Place the ice cubes in different areas of the room. Do they melt faster in some places than in others? Why?
- *Float and Sink*—Encourage hypothesizing (guessing). Use several objects—soap, a dry sock, a bottle of shampoo, a wet

sponge, an empty bottle. Ask your child which objects will float when dropped into water in a sink or bathtub. Then drop the objects in the water, one by one, to test your child's hypotheses.

- *Caring for and Feeding Plants*—Teach cause-and-effect relationships. Give your child two similar, healthy plants. Ask the child to water one plant and ignore the other for a week or two, keeping both plants in the same place. At the end of that time, ask the child to water the drooping plant. Then talk about what happened and why.



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## Grades (4-5)

Educational research has made it clear that parents who are actively involved in their children's learning at home help their children become more successful learners in and out of school.

Here are some reading, writing, math, and social studies Home Learning Recipe activities. Parents of fourth and fifth graders will find them to be easy and enjoyable ways to work with the school—using materials they have at home to build their children's skills. Many of the activities focus on talk—sharing ideas and feelings, providing information, and responding to the needs of youngsters to grow as separate and responsible individuals.

### Reading Activities

- *A Lifetime of Reading*—Encourage lifelong reading. Read with youngsters by taking roles in stories and acting out dramatic poems. Whenever possible, tape record these sessions. Then listen to and enjoy these performances together.
- *Street Smarts*—Put reading skills to practical use. Gather bus and subway route maps and schedules to a special place in your area—the zoo, a museum, a football stadium. Let your child plan a trip for friends or family. Figure out the transportation available, the travel time required, the cost, and the best time to make the trip.
- *TV and the World*—Connect current events to TV viewing. Post a world map next to the TV set. Watch the TV news with your children and have them locate world news spots. Keep reference books such as dictionaries and the world almanac close by. In this way, children can find answers to questions they might have about words or foreign countries.

### Writing Activities

- *Day-by-Day Calendar*—Turn a large calendar—commercial or home made—into a personalized family communication center. Have children fill in the blanks with morning messages, weather reports, birthdays, special activities, or notes to the family.
- *Writing Instead of Talking*—Exchange notes instead of words at different times during the day—when getting up in the morning, at dinner, or at bedtime—or whenever the noise level becomes too high.
- *Picture Stories*—Develop imagination and creativity. Have children select four or five pictures from magazines and newspapers, and put them together to tell a story. Ask children to number the pictures—1, 2, 3, etc. First, ask them to tell the story with the pictures in numerical order. Then, ask them to write it down on paper. For variety, have children rearrange the pictures and tell a new story using this different arrangement.

### Math Activities

- *A Trip to the Supermarket*—Plan ahead with the 3 R's. Ask your child to choose a dish to prepare for a meal—a pudding, a salad, a sandwich. Have your child check to see what supplies are on hand and then make a written shopping list. At the supermarket, let the child select the food on the list. First, the child decides which items are the best buys on the

shelves and then makes selections. Also have the child write the price of each item on the list and figure the total, checking the prices against the sales slip.

- *On the Move*—Sharpen math skills on trips. Use even short trips around town for learning experiences. For example, at the gas station, ask your child how much gas you needed and the cost per gallon. On the highway, ask children to read the signs and check the different speed limits. Then ask them to watch the speedometer readings and notice how fast or slow the car is going. Have children estimate distances between cities and check the estimates on a road map.
- *Newspaper Math*—Introduce new topics for dinnertable conversation. Ask your child to pretend to be an investor and choose a stock from the stock market pages of the daily newspaper. Have your child keep a record of the stock's progress for a week or two and then figure profit or loss. Discuss baseball and football scores and averages on the sports pages. Who are the high scorers? What are the percentages?

### Social Studies Activities

- *History Time Line*—Record history at home. Stretch a roll of shelf paper along the floor. Use a ruler to make a horizontal line about three feet long. (Use a separate sheet for each child.) Ask children to fill in the important dates in their own lives, starting with their date of birth. Those familiar with U.S. history can fill in the significant dates since the founding of our country. Display these finished time lines in a prominent place for all to see.
- *The Foreign Touch*—Travel abroad at home. Visit ethnic shops, foodstores, and restaurants in your community. Give your children time to browse, eat a snack or dessert, and perhaps buy a trinket. Before the trip, discuss different ethnic customs and have children find the country on a map. After the trip, let children talk about what they have seen.
- *A Closer Look*—Look more closely at the family division of labor. Help your children become aware of family responsibilities by making a chart of family chores, including the name of the person responsible, the days and time required, etc. Discuss ways to change or improve these job assignments.

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# Grades (6-8)



Educational research has made it clear that parents who are actively involved in their children's learning at home help their children become more successful learners in and out of school. During the adolescent years, adult guidance is especially important; parents are primary role models and home teachers.

Here are some reading, writing, math, social studies, and health Home Learning Recipe activities. Parents of sixth to eighth graders will find them to be easy and enjoyable ways to work with the school—using materials they have at home to build their children's skills. These activities will also help teens and parents talk together about matters both care about, which improves family communication at this crucial time.

### Reading Activities

- *Getting Around*—Put reading skills to practical use. Gather bus and subway route maps and schedules to a special place in your area—the zoo, a museum, a football stadium. Let your child plan a trip for friends or family. Figure out the transportation available, the travel time required, the cost, and the best time to make the trip.
- *Finding Needed Information*—Introduce your child to the many kinds of information in the daily newspaper. Ask your child to find the pages containing news about government leaders, editor's opinions, weather reports of European cities, car sales, house and apartment rentals, and want ads. Discuss how this information is used.
- *Follow the News*—Keep well informed. As a family, choose an important news event to follow for a day or two. Ask each person to find as much information on the topic as possible—read newspapers, listen to the radio, watch TV news. Then talk about what everyone learned in a special family get-together.

### Writing Activities

- *Nice Words*—Make someone happy. Write each family member's name on separate sheets of paper. Add a note or a drawing to each sheet—for example, "I like the way you make breakfast," or "You make me happy when you do the

dishes." Fold the sheets and put them in a bag and shake. Ask each person to choose a paper from the bag. Place the notes where they can be found by family members. At the end of the day, talk together about the notes.

- *Easy Essays*—Play a writing game. Make a family game of discussing a special issue—for example, "Teenagers should be allowed to vote," or "There should never be any homework." Ask youngsters to think of all the reasons they can to support their views. Then, ask them to think of reasons against their views. First, ask for these pros and cons orally. Then, ask youngsters to write their views on paper. Read these aloud, discussing and comparing them. Which views are most convincing? For variety, assign family members to teams and have teams prepare their arguments pro and con.
- *Looking at Advertisements*—Take a closer look. Help your children improve their thinking and writing skills by looking more carefully at newspaper, magazine, and TV advertisements. What is the main point of the ad? What details does it use to communicate its message? For example, a strong, handsome man holding a soft drink in an expensive car with a beautiful girl at his side is telling us something about the soft drink.

### **Math Activities**

- *Managing Money*—Put math skills to work. Help your children understand living costs by discussing household expenses with them. For example, make a list of monthly bills—heat, electricity, telephone, mortgage or rent. Fold the paper to hide the costs and ask youngsters to guess the cost of each item. Unfold the paper. How do the estimates compare with the actual costs? Were they close?
- *Percentages and Decimals*—Are they really necessary? Illustrate by asking your children to look through the newspaper to find and list as many percentages and decimal numbers as possible—advertised sale prices, sports scores, bank rates.
- *Living Within Your Means*—Practice budgeting skills. Teach children who have allowances or regular spending money how to budget. Ask them to make a two-column list of expenses and income. List the allowance or spending money under income. Under expenses, list what they expect to spend for movies, records, lunches, etc. Then, have youngsters add all the expenses and subtract the total from the income. If their expenses are greater than their income, ask them to think of ways to reduce their spending to keep within their budget. If their income is more than their expenses, suggest a savings plan.

### **Social Studies Activities**

- *Expanding Horizons*—Help your child learn about people from different countries. Suggest talking to neighbors from foreign countries, reading library books about other cultures, reading newspapers, and watching TV specials.
- *Let Your Voice Be Heard*—Promote good citizenship. Help your child write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper about an issue affecting children. For example, suggest that a bike path be built near the school or that a city event be planned for youngsters.

### **Health Activity**

- *Exercise for Good Health*—Emphasize the value of exercise. Ask your child to do at least one kind of exercise every day. For example, run or walk briskly for 10 minutes. Walk, when possible, instead of riding, for any distance less than a mile. Have your youngster make a practical, week-long exercise plan. Offer a reward for sticking to the plan. Repeat it for a second and third week.



# **Grades (9–12)**

Sometimes it's easy to forget about the important role that families play in children's education—especially as children become teenagers. Parent involvement in student schooling usually declines dramatically as children reach the teen years. Teens are finding their own identity and asserting their independence. And parents can find adolescents baffling—because they are simultaneously grownup and not grownup.

What continues to be clear is that adolescents need adult guidance. Teens need to know that their parents care about them. The activities that follow help parents and teens talk together to solve problems they both care about.

The future is never a "sure thing." What is sure is that there will always be problems, and students need the ability to tackle them. Teenagers need to learn how to make grownup decisions—to decide about careers, to make personal value judgments, to learn how to get along on jobs and to manage households.

This leaflet uses problem-solving activities. It is designed to help parents build their teenagers' problem-solving skills. To learn these skills, students need practice—practice they can get at home.

## The Problem-Solving Habit

Even teenagers can get used to sizing up a problem and coming up with common sense ways to solve it. Here's a six-step method that works and can be done easily at home by parent and child.

### STEP 1: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

This is a first, often overlooked, step in problem solving. You have to be able to state or define the problem and, if there's a conflict, the opposing views and feelings about the issue. For example: For a teen, it might be whether to go to a certain party; for a parent, whether to ask for a raise.

### STEP 2: WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

This is when you come up with a variety of solutions. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible without judging which ones are better than others. Just keep the ideas coming.

### STEP 3: WHAT ARE THE GOOD AND BAD POINTS OF THESE SOLUTIONS?

This is when you evaluate the different solutions. What are the pros and cons of each one? You're making judgments, assessing the possible solutions in light of your experience and the way the world works. And in this process you may well come up with a new and better solution than any you originally thought of.

### STEP 4: MAKING THE DECISION

This is the moment you choose a solution to try. Pick one or perhaps two based on the decisions made in Step 3. Talk about why you selected these solutions.

### STEP 5: PUTTING THE DECISION INTO ACTION

Now you put your decision to the test. In advance, talk about what will happen and what might be expected. What obstacles can you anticipate? What 'helps' can you expect? How can traps be avoided by building on the helps?

### STEP 6: HOW DID IT GO?

This is the followup, the evaluation of your decision and what followed from it. How did it work? What changes must be made in the solution so that it will work better? What would you try next time? It's possible that a decision that sounded good will not work as well in real life. But, overall, there is a greater chance for success when decisions and solutions are selected based upon this step-by-step process.

After going through the process with one problem, ask your teenager to try another. Review the six steps so that everyone will be able to keep on using them afterward. The goal is to help teens get into the habit of this kind of rational problem solving.

## The Problem "Bank"

Just in case you don't have enough problems of your own to solve, here are a few you can use to practice the six-step problem-solving method:

- Who gets to use the car?
- Why is it bad to smoke?
- When does the garbage get taken out?
- What happens when I go for a few days with little sleep?
- How much TV are we going to watch?
- How much money do I need this week?
- Can I buy that new pair of jeans?
- Whose turn is it to go grocery shopping?
- Who has to babysit the younger brother?
- When is a good time to visit grandma?
- What happens when I take a test without studying for it?
- Why can't I go to that after-school party?



## Feelings Are Important

Start talking about how family members feel.

Here's a KNOW YOURSELF activity: Think together about what makes people angry. Everyone gets angry for different reasons. Some people get angry when others take something from them; others get angry when people don't listen.

Ask yourselves: What do we do when we get angry? Some people try to cool off before they speak. Others start fights. Some people scream. Some people don't say anything. What do you do?

Caring about others is another area teens can often use help with. Talk together about the problems of being a parent, the problems of being a student. Think about a recent situation in which you disagreed with each other. Exchange places; the parent is the youngster, the youngster the parent. Afterward, talk about it. Do you understand each other better now?

## Common Sense

The basic ingredient in common sense is experience—good and bad kinds. This gets put into the storehouse of our minds, to be used when the time is right. Common sense is not a sense we are born with. The activities in this leaflet help give teenagers practice in problem-solving experiences that are the basis of common sense.

The Home and School Institute, developer of these activities, specializes in nurturing the academic and social development of all children by helping families creatively use the available resources of the home and community. For more home activities, contact the Home and School Institute, Special Projects Office, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. (202) 466-3633. ■



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